United Nations E/CN.6/2019/NGO/73

# Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
19 November 2018

Original: English

**Commission on the Status of Women**
**Sixty-third session**
11–22 March 2019
**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century"**

## Statement submitted by Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Graduate Women International (GWI), Salvation Army, The Tandem Project, The Universal Peace Federation, Women's Federation for World Peace International, and World Federation of Ukrainian Women's Organizations, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



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## Statement

## Women's Federation for World Peace, International 63rd Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW63)

Women's Federation for World Peace International, and the undersigned international and national non-governamental organizations in general and special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, commend the priority theme of the 63rd session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women: Social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

Gender equality depends heavily on useful and efficient systems put in place internationally, nationally and at the grassroots level to enable the empowerment of all citizens. When social protections are not in place, it is the women and girls specifically who are inordinately affected by the absence of such infrastructure.

Access to public services and sustainable infrastructure are vital for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. It is reported that the Millennium Development Goals have had success in the areas of reducing extreme poverty, accessibility to safe drinking water and improving access to education. Less progress has been made in reducing hunger and maternal mortality, as well as in improving access to sanitation.

In order to provide these necessary tools to each woman, regardless of age, race, religion, geographic location, in addition to other variables, efforts must be made to bring these services to the grassroots level. Adequate food, health care and access to proper sanitation are vital components to the health and well-being of women and girls at the most basic level. The absence of healthcare and proper sanitation directly impacts the success of a girl at school and in life. Lack of proper sanitary supplies, as well as adequate toilets, impacts the education of girls and can be a major cause for them to leave school. Lack of healthcare education, including the availability of appropriate guidance regarding healthy decision making about sex and relationships as well as the availability of sanitary products, can catapult girls into precarious situations of unwelcome pregnancies, poverty, abuse, illness, and even death.

Directly related is the necessity for adequate social protection to be in place for the sustainability and security of the smallest component of society; the family. In the preamble for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the family is considered the fundamental unit of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly children. Therefore, it should be afforded the necessary protection and assistance so that it can fully assume its responsibilities within the community.

The May 2018 report of the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund summarizes that six of the Sustainable Development Goals: poverty; health; education; gender equality; youth unemployment; and ending violence can be positively impacted by well-designed family-focused policies. The family, as the elementary social unit, will inevitably influence the progress of the societies in which they are part.

In addition, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime found, through the Strengthening Families Programme introduced in Central America and the Caribbean, scientific evidence proving the effectiveness of targeting and adolescents to prevent drug abuse, crime and other high-risk behaviours in youth. This programme was

initiated in Panama in low and middle-class families. It contributes to the ongoing effort in the fields of drug prevention, HIV/AIDS, and crime amongst the juvenile population through the participation of the family as a fundamental unit in prevention. The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund report also agrees that the family should not be underestimated in its role as an enabling agent in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

It is within a safe family environment that a child receives the physical and emotional nurturing necessary to withstand the challenging events of life. This smallest component of every society is where a bulk of unpaid domestic work is performed, as well as the support and care of children, the disabled and the elderly. It is up to the provision of public services, infrastructure, and social protection policies, as well as civil society, to ensure a satisfactory infrastructure is in place in all countries to support the future's most precious asset.

Women face difficult or dangerous situations worldwide and are often unable to see beyond the daily survival and safety of their families and themselves. National and international programs for social protection, as well as efforts from civil society and non-governmental organizations, offer support and provide resources for women to aspire further than their immediate barriers.

In addition, young women have a vital role to play. As stated in the context of Security Council Resolution 1325, they need a place at the decision-making table to ensure that the needs of all women and girls are being addressed in policymaking. According to United Nations Women, when women are included in decisions, there is a 35 percent increase in the probability of that resolve lasting at least 15 years.

Non-governmental organizations occupy a privileged position as mediators between governments providing social protections and those that benefit from them. They provide programs fostering health, education and leadership aspirations, which guide women and girls to take responsibility for transformation in their families, communities and eventually ownership of the goals of the United Nations. In his address to the United Nations General Assembly on 4 April 2016, Secretary-General Antonio Guterres mentioned that the world spends much more energy and resources managing crises than preventing them. Investing resources into the family will go a long way in supporting a culture of prevention.

We the undersigned, encourage governments and those in civil society to invest funds and collaborate with non-governmental organizations on the ground to implement social protection efforts. Through strong commitment, communication, and collaboration between local governments and non-governmental organizations, the family can be valued as a lifeline for efficient and effective development. With such recognition, the empowerment of women and girls and gender equality can be realized.